

5 Tips for Tackling Fear

1. Name it.

First, recognize fear as the problem. You cannot do anything about something you cannot name. Then identify what it is a fear of (e.g., snakes, failure, snow). Lots of time fear shows up masked as something else. If you are avoiding someone or something, procrastinating on a project, irritated with your children, jumpy walking home - all of these quite possibly have fear at their root (and it is not always obvious what that fear is!).

2. Look it in the eyes. www.twowisetchicks.com

Yes, look at what you are afraid of head on. That huge pile of laundry? Stare it down until it no longer defines you as a lazy person. That annoying co-worker? Keep staring (they'll probably squirm, or wonder what happened to you, or call their mommy). The longer you can look at something (literally or figuratively) - its' power over you lessens. Honest. try it!

3. Breathe.

Yes. Holding our breath is actually one of those physiological 'signals' to the brain that we are either drowning, suffocating or in a state of panic or shock. Either way, unless you breathe (or if indeed you are submerged in water - skip to the next step) - and do so consciously and calmly, your body chemistry will take over for you and voila - you feel scared/stressed again. Breathe - especially while doing step 2 above.

4. Talk to yourself (whisper sweet nothings).

Self-talk is very important, especially WHAT you say to yourself. Muttering about how you're going to fail, die, explode, cry, or hyperventilate are all big no-nos. Your already hyper-alert physiological system listens to what you're saying. Our nervous system does not have eyes, and is a very literal creature. Tell it you're about to die, it will completely believe you and go into hyperdrive. Or shut down completely. Either way, not the state you are going for. Stick with basic niceties such as 'You're doing great', 'You'll be okay', or simply 'just breathe'. Some people count to ten over and over in their head. If that is how simple you need to start, go for it. Anything that stops the looping negative self-talk is an excellent place to start.

5. Recognize Your Success

Depending on the intensity of your fear, you may need to start with baby steps. Repeat steps 1-4 over and over. Do them in little chunks. Whatever is manageable. But at the end of it, recognize your success. This is extremely important. Recognize if you managed to slow your thoughts, or simply control your breathing, or even if you could just stand there for 20 seconds looking at the object of your fear when before that you couldn't even tolerate it for 2 seconds. As soon as your thoughts and actions (or body reactions) start to gain a sense of competency in the face of fear, the object or situation lessens its power over you, and you will find yourself becoming more and more empowered (hence less and less fearful).

Of course, if you feel or believe that Fear is something over which at this point you have little or no control, you may wish to seek out professional help. There is no shame in this, and you are certainly not alone.